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13 October 2009

Fighting the global backlash against women's human rights

Motion for a resolution

tabled by Mr Daniel DUCARME and other members of the Assembly

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

The world is currently witnessing a terrible backlash against women's human rights. The following are just some of the most recent examples.

In Sudan, journalist and former UN employee Lubna Ahmed Hussein was jailed for one month on 7 September 2009 after refusing to pay a fine for "dressing indecently" by wearing loose-fitting trousers. Several other women who were originally arrested together with her for the same reason (including from the Christian and animist south, to whom the law in question should not apply) received 10 lashes as punishment for the alleged offence.

In Afghanistan, the Shia Personal Status Law came into force on 27 July 2009, which strips away many women's rights enshrined in the country's constitution and violates the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to which the country is a party. It applies to about 10 to 20% of the population. The law gives a husband the right to withdraw basic maintenance from his wife, including food, if she refuses to obey his sexual demands. It grants guardianship of children exclusively to their fathers and grandfathers. It requires women to get permission from their husband to work. It also effectively allows a rapist to avoid prosecution by paying "blood money" to a girl who was injured when he raped her.

In Mali, a new family code which extended more equal rights to women and girls was sent back to Parliament for review by President Amadou Toumani Toure at the end of August. The new code, which has been under review for the past decade, sparked protests in the country. The bill would have set the legal age for girls to marry at 18 years, and would have removed the wife's obligation to obey her husband, replacing it with a provision that husbands and wives "owe each other 'loyalty, protection, help and assistance.'"

In Yemen, a twelve-year old girl died in childbirth mid-September, one of many victims of underage and forced marriages in the country. Yemen has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality and morbidity as a consequence of the average age of marriage in rural areas being 12-13 years for girls.

The Parliamentary Assembly is not ready to sit back and watch these attacks on women's human rights all over the world which have spill-over effects even in Europe (in particular in communities with a migrant background). The Assembly thus resolves to fight the global backlash against women's human rights.

Signed (see overleaf)



Signed¹:

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1. ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
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